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ABSTRACT

This publication focuses on the knowledge base of middle school teacher preparation emphasizing organizing principles that define an excellent middle grades teacher education program. It is designed to complement the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) standards, which focus on licensure, and those of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), which define advanced certification of excellent teachers. The document begins with a historical perspective on the preparation of middle grades teachers, including licensure, recent trends, and consensus program components. Part two discusses the "wise and experienced" middle grades teacher in relation to young adolescent development, curriculum, instruction, school organization, family and community relations, and teaching roles. Part three examines three components that make up an excellent middle grades teacher preparation program within the context of school site delivery. These elements include the foundations of a teacher education program, subject area study or teaching field preparation, and elements of middle grades specialization. The document concludes with a brief discussion of the future of middle grades teacher preparation and the role of these organizing principles. (Contains 49 references.) (ND)

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A Vision of Excellence

Organizing Principles for Middle Grades Teacher Preparation

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Commissioned by
DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund

Center for Early Adolescence
and
National Middle School Association

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NATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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Preface

A Vision of Excellence: Organizing Principles for Middle Grades Teacher Preparation was developed with the generous support of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund through a grant to the Center for Early Adolescence. The document is based on the extensive experiences of the authors as well as their familiarity with the middle grades teacher preparation knowledge base. We have a combined total of 86 years in middle grades education, 19 of which were spent teaching in middle grades schools. Among the four of us, we have taught math, physical education, social studies, art, language arts, health, reading, and science. We have been involved in middle grades teacher education at eight colleges and universities in seven states, including small liberal arts colleges, comprehensive universities, and research institutions. Among the four of us, we have founded four state middle school journals and edited a total of six journals including the *Middle School Journal.* We have served on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards Early Adolescence/Generalist Standards Committee, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Board of Examiners, and the National Middle School Association Board of Trustees. We hope our experience provides us with a sense of the possible. In addition, we have received valuable advice from the national panel of experts listed in the Appendix.

This publication often speaks in terms of "musts" and "shoulds." This is not done to be prescriptive. Rather, if readers seek to realize our vision of the ideal, we believe they must implement the organizing principles we present. We fully recognize that there may be as many ways of addressing the various organizing principles as there are middle grades teacher preparation programs.

Our vision is set forth in a prologue, three major sections, and an epilogue. Part I provides a brief history of middle grades teacher prepara-

tion. Important documents that address aspects of this topic are cited in the discussion. In Part II, attention is turned to what wise and experienced teachers of young adolescents should know and be able to do in order to perform their roles successfully. Each of six areas of competence is carefully delineated to provide guidance for program planners. Part III examines three components that make up an excellent middle grades teacher preparation program within the context of school site delivery. The first component consists of the foundational areas that undergird a teacher education program, including a liberal education and ten areas that comprise a professional teacher knowledge base. The second component addresses the issue of subject area study or teaching field preparation. Then, elements of middle grades specialization that lead to creating wise and experienced middle grades teachers are examined. The Epilogue concludes the monograph with a brief discussion of the future of middle grades teacher preparation and the role of these organizing principles.

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PROLOGUE

A New Vision

Establishing any successful enterprise requires both a sense of vision and a means to achieve it. A means without a vision leads to aimless drifting, while a vision without the means is naïve idealism. Yet, for any vision, there may be a number of successful alternative routes to follow in circumventing obstacles that block the way toward the end. *A Vision of Excellence: Organizing Principles for Middle Grades Teacher Preparation* is intended to meet the first requirement for establishing successful enterprises in middle grades teacher preparation: the articulation of that essential vision.

Our intent is to provide a "North Star" that a variety of educational mariners can use, regardless of their navigational route, in an attempt to arrive at a destination of excellence in middle grades teacher education. Our purpose is to set forth organizing principles that define an exemplary middle grades teacher preparation program.

This document was written to strengthen the knowledge base of middle grades teacher preparation. It is designed to complement several existing documents. As such, it is situated between National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) standards, which focus on licensure, and those of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), which define advanced certification of excellent teachers. All of these documents are part of efforts to provide a highly articulated system of recruitment, induction, licensure, and advanced certification for middle grades teachers. These efforts are guided by our desire for coherence within the profession. Lacking this coherence, we will continue to function in isolation, unable to successfully fulfill our mission of educating young adolescents. Yet while these

documents and other important resources helpful to those designing preparation programs have emerged recently, no one of these resources specifically presents a coherent set of principles to guide the design of *exemplary* middle grades teacher preparation programs for beginning teachers.

The influential *National Middle School Association/National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education-Approved Curriculum Guidelines* for middle grades teacher preparation has been useful to those planning middle grades teacher preparation programs or revising existing ones. These guidelines were written to be part of the NCATE unit accreditation process and, therefore, focus on specific program components.

The *NASDTEC Outcome-Based Standards and Portfolio Assessment: Outcome-Based Teacher Education Standards for Elementary, Middle, and High School Levels* has also provided guidance. These standards were designed for use in developing middle grades teacher preparation programs that would satisfy state certification/licensure requirements across the nation.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards defines what highly accomplished, experienced middle grades teachers should know and be able to do. The contents of these standards are valuable in continuing the growth and development of practicing middle grades teachers.

A Vision of Excellence: Organizing Principles for Middle Grades Teacher Preparation both reflects and expands the knowledge base on beginning middle grades teacher preparation and presents the total program in a manner that allows those utilizing it the flexibility to create their own visions of how the curriculum can be implemented. This publication is consciously not designed to be "a prescribed curriculum," but rather to articulate a set of principles that could be used without losing sight of the excellence that should be a part of all middle grades teacher preparation programs. As such, it should be useful to both the novice and the experienced middle grades teacher educator.

The authors hope that the reader will find these principles useful in designing and implementing an exemplary middle grades teacher preparation curriculum. These principles, when used in concert with other resources, should provide a foundation on which to build a solid, research-based program that will attract and prepare capable middle grades teachers who have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions to become highly accomplished teachers of young adolescents. ⌟

PART I

Middle Grades Teacher Preparation: A Historical Perspective

The effort to establish highly successful middle grades schools and programs has been impeded from the beginning by a lack of specially prepared teachers who have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions needed to successfully teach young adolescents. Throughout the junior high and middle school movements, this age-group has been taught primarily by teachers whose initial professional preparation and interests lay at other levels and by those with middle grades career goals who have found specialized middle grades teacher preparation programs simply unavailable. Teacher preparation institutions, state departments of education, and the teaching profession itself have, until recently, failed to recognize the importance and necessity of such programs. For these and related circumstances, many middle grades teachers are being inadequately prepared to meet successfully the challenging and rewarding task of understanding and effectively educating young adolescents (McEwin, 1984, 1992).

Despite calls in the literature for more than 60 years for specially prepared middle grades teachers (Koos, 1927), the majority of middle grades teachers have had no specialized middle grades professional preparation (McEwin, Dickinson, & Jenkins, work in progress; Scales, 1992; Scales & McEwin, 1994). This is not an unexpected finding since only 33% of teacher preparation institutions in the country had such programs at any degree level in 1991 (McEwin & Dickinson, 1995).

Because of the lack of specialized middle grades teacher preparation programs and the licensure requirements that encourage and/or require them, the large majority of young adolescents are being taught by teachers who were prepared to teach other age-groups in other kinds of schools. For example, a 1991 eight-state survey of middle grades teachers found that only 17% had received specialized middle grades professional prepara-

tion (Scales, 1992). A 1993 survey of 2,139 middle school teachers in five states that contain the majority (57%) of the nation's middle grades teacher preparation programs found that only 22% had received undergraduate preparation in a program specifically designed for middle grades teaching. An additional 33%, however, had received middle grades preparation at the graduate level, indicating that the availability of specialized middle grades teacher preparation programs in these states has resulted in the majority of middle grades teachers having had such preparation at some degree level (Scales & McEwin, 1994; McEwin & Dickinson, 1995).

Middle Grades Teacher Licensure

The failure of many states to require special certification/licensure requirements is one major reason why there are so few specialized middle grades teacher preparation programs. Only 33 states had specialized middle grades teacher certification/licensure or endorsements in 1992 (Valentine & Mogar, 1992). This does represent an increase in the number of states since only 15 had such plans in 1978 (Gillan, 1978) and 26 states in 1984 (McEwin & Allen, 1985). However, only 11 of the 33 states that now have special middle grades licenses or endorsements actually *require* middle level teachers to hold them in order to teach young adolescents. This situation exists despite the fact that specialized middle grades licensure directly influences the establishment of middle grades teacher preparation programs and significantly helps shape program content. For example, in 1991, 82% of specialized middle grades teacher preparation programs were in 11 states that require middle grades teacher licensure to teach in the middle grades. The other 18% of middle grades teacher education programs were in states that allowed middle grades teaching with an overlapping elementary and/or secondary license (e.g., grades K-8, 6-12) (McEwin & Dickinson, 1995).

Prospective and practicing teachers are unlikely to undertake special preparation that is not required to practice their profession. Altruism alone is seldom sufficient motivation for middle grades teachers to seek out this preparation when there is no recognition of their efforts to gain new knowledge and skills (Alexander & McEwin, 1988). Likewise, higher education institutions are unlikely to develop the full middle grades teacher preparation programs needed when there is no specialized license required for middle grades teaching. Distinctive, nonoverlapping middle grades teacher licensure is needed that includes only the middle grades (5-8, 6-9, etc.) and excludes wide grade overlaps (K-8, 6-12, etc.) with elementary

or secondary licenses. The acceptance of the idea of "no specialized knowledge needed" must be eliminated so that middle grades classrooms can be staffed with teachers who have the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions to succeed professionally.

Recent research (Scales & McEwin, 1994) shows clearly that practicing middle school teachers prepared in "mixed" preparation programs (elementary/middle/secondary, elementary/middle, or middle/secondary) do not rate the quality of their professional preparation highly, while those who graduate from programs that focus specifically and extensively on middle grades teaching rate their programs much more positively: "The greater the number of courses devoted to the middle level, the more favorably respondents rated their middle level preparation programs on each of the topics investigated" (p. 76). These and related results from this study should significantly advance efforts to establish comprehensive middle grades teacher preparation programs and the licensure requirements that sustain them.

Only when middle grades licensure becomes universally required will young adolescents be assured of having teachers who have received the specialized preparation needed to serve them well. Without distinctive, mandatory licensure requirements, the dubious practice of allowing almost anyone with any kind of professional preparation to teach young adolescents will continue.

Recent Trends in Middle Grades Teacher Preparation

There are some encouraging signs in middle grades teacher preparation. As noted above, the number of states with special licensure requirements is increasing. There is also a wider recognition that specialized middle grades teacher preparation is needed and desirable. These beliefs, and their resultant actions, have been brought about by a number of factors too numerous to be discussed fully here. However, those responsible for establishing new middle grades teacher preparation programs, or revising existing ones, should be aware of existing resources such as those listed below (full references are found in the "Reference/Resources" section).

- *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century,* Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989). This influential document includes a recommendation that "teachers in middle grades schools should be selected and specially educated to teach young adolescents" (p. 58).

- *Professional Certification and Preparation for the Middle Level: A Position Paper of National Middle School Association* (1991). This publication includes the most recent official position taken by NMSA as well as an earlier position paper.
- *National Middle School Association/National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education-Approved Curriculum Guidelines* (1991). These are the first national curriculum guidelines established for middle grades teacher preparation programs and are a part of the NCATE folio review and accreditation process.
- The *Early Adolescence/Generalist* and *Early Adolescence/English Language Arts Standards*, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The decision of the NBPTS to establish separate and distinct voluntary certificates for highly accomplished middle grades teachers has advanced the cause of special middle grades teacher preparation and provided valuable guidance regarding what middle grades teachers should know and be able to do. Standards for science, social studies/history, and mathematics also are being written.
- *Windows of Opportunity: Improving Middle Grades Teacher Preparation* by Peter C. Scales (1992). This study provides important recommendations and includes a comprehensive review of the literature.
- *Growing Pains: The Making of America's Middle School Teachers* by Peter C. Scales and C. Kenneth McEwin (1994) reports landmark data based on responses from 2,139 practicing middle school teachers about their professional preparation. Recommendations are made for improving middle grades teacher preparation based on results from several Center for Early Adolescence research projects.
- *NASDTEC Outcome-Based Standards and Portfolio Assessment: Outcome-Based Teacher Education Standards for Elementary, Middle, and High School Levels*, National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (1994). NASDTEC has greatly expanded its standards for middle grades teachers and stated them in an outcome-based format.
- *On Site: Preparing Middle Level Teachers Through Field Experiences* by Deborah A. Butler, Mary A. Davies, and Thomas S. Dickinson (1991). This important publication includes a

number of middle grades field experience models and related information.

- *The Professional Preparation of Middle School Teachers: Profiles of Successful Programs* by C. Kenneth McEwin and Thomas S. Dickinson (1995). This new publication contains an extensive review of the literature and profiles 14 middle grades teacher preparation programs from across the nation.
- *Meeting the Standards: Improving Middle Level Teacher Education* by John Swaim and Greg Stefanich (work in progress). This report highlights exemplary program components that meet NMSA/NCATE-approved curriculum guidelines.

Examination of the contents of these and other professional publications demonstrates that there is now a strong and growing consensus on the nature of appropriate middle grades teacher preparation programs. Support is coming from:

- middle level principals (DeMedio & Mazur-Stewart, 1990; Keefe, Clark, Nickerson, & Valentine, 1983; Valentine, Clark, Nickerson, & Keefe, 1981);
- middle level teachers (Boyer, 1983; DeMedio & Kish, 1982; DeMedio & Mazur-Stewart, 1990; Page, F., Page, J., Dickinson, Warkentin, & Tibbles, 1992);
- middle level university professors (DeMedio & Helms, 1984);
- foundations such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989) and the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund (Scales & McEwin, 1994);
- the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE);
- national professional associations such as National Middle School Association (*Professional Certification and Preparation for the Middle Level*, 1991; *This We Believe*, 1992), National Association of Secondary School Principals (*An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level*, 1985), and National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (*NASDTEC Outcome-Based Standards and Portfolio Assessment*, 1994);
- the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1992, 1993); and

- state departments of education such as California (*Caught in the Middle*, 1987), North Carolina (*Last Best Chance*, 1991), and Georgia (*Linking Services for Georgia's Young Adolescents*, 1993).

Consensus Program Components

The following components are "essential elements" of middle grades teacher preparation programs. Please note that those listed are specific to the middle grades. Other important programmatic components such as school reform and diversity issues are not discussed in this section because of their importance to all teacher preparation programs regardless of the grade levels or teaching fields. We do, however, examine these issues in the "Foundations" section in Part III.

Critical components of middle grades teacher preparation programs include:

- coursework and field experiences focusing on: (a) the developmental characteristics and needs of young adolescents within social, cultural, and societal contexts; (b) middle grades curriculum and organization; (c) middle grades teaching strategies; and (d) middle grades reading instruction;
- a broad academic background, including at least two teaching fields at the undergraduate level; and
- early and continuing field experiences, including student teaching, in the middle grades.

In summary, progress has been made, but much remains to be accomplished. Teachers of young adolescents too often begin their careers having had little or no opportunity to gain the specialized knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions needed to be highly successful. Furthermore, practicing teachers too frequently find little or no opportunity to attend classes that focus on their middle grades teaching specialty. Middle grades teachers, and their students, need and deserve better. Teacher preparation programs that focus on the organizing principles described in this document should be available universally, and licensure that supports these principles should be required. The young adolescents themselves will ultimately benefit from excellence in middle grades teacher preparation programs as they will bring to adulthood the degree of competence our society needs. ❑

PART II

The Goal: The Wise and Experienced Middle Grades Teacher

> ***wise**, adj., a. characterized by wisdom; marked by deep understanding, keen discernment, and a capacity for sound judgment b. exercising sound judgment; prudent; knowing; wise suggests great understanding of people and of situations and unusual discernment and judgment in dealing with them.*
>
> ***experienced**, adj., made skillful or wise through experience.*
>
> — Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1993, p. 409, 1358.

Our vision of highly successful middle grades teacher preparation programs begins with the ultimate goal of all middle grades teacher preparation and professional development – an excellent teacher of young adolescents. We refer to this educator as "the wise and experienced middle grades teacher." It is our vision that highly successful programs will contribute greatly to increasing their number, as will successful middle schools and other forms of professional development, to the point where their presence in the classroom will be an expectation rather than a happy accident.

Wise and experienced middle grades teachers are not merely outcomes of highly successful middle grades teacher preparation programs. Although their postsecondary education begins at the college or university, they have had more than 20 years of life's experiences before college graduation. Their professional education is continued in middle grades schools under the tutelage of colleagues and even the young adolescents themselves. Wise and experienced middle grades teachers are, therefore, a product of formal educational experiences, ongoing education in the schools, and continuing professional development and personal reflection. As such learners, wise and experienced teachers maintain a lifelong commitment to learning.

The road to becoming the wise and experienced teacher begins with the formal college education of the individual. We know that for individuals who come to the middle grades classroom without special preparation the journey to excellence is long and fraught with difficulty. By beginning in a specially designed program with a vision of excellence – one that spans all stages of professional preparation from recruitment to induction – and a means to achieve it, the teacher is placed on a clearer path to success.

Thus, this vision's endpoint corresponds to the goals that the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards sets in its program of voluntary national certification. We seek to align highly successful middle grades preparation programs with this vision by the articulation of organizing principles that will provide a template for these programs to follow. We see graduates of these programs finding their way into middle grades schools and classrooms where they will practice their craft, grow reflectively and experientially, and thereby advance both the education of their students and the goals of the middle school movement.

We need wise and experienced teachers to teach our children. We need wise and experienced middle grades teachers to work with their colleagues in middle grades schools throughout this nation during the next century. We need to begin now to develop teachers through highly successful programs that have both a vision of excellence and the means to achieve it.

The Wise and Experienced Middle Grades Teacher

Wise and experienced middle grades teachers integrate at least six areas of competence into their practice:

1. early adolescent development;
2. middle grades curriculum;
3. middle grades instruction;
4. middle grades school organization;
5. families and community relations; and
6. middle grades teaching roles.

In relation to young adolescent development, wise and experienced middle grades teachers:

- understand the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and moral aspects of development;
- understand the social, cultural, and societal context in which contemporary youth develop;
- understand the issues of young adolescent health, sexuality, and risk behaviors;
- establish classroom environments, curriculum, instruction, and professional relations that both support and extend the positive and productive development of young adolescents; and
- engage youth in the development of emerging abilities, aptitudes, and pursuits.

Young adolescents are involved in a period of dynamic personal and social growth. The demands of physical growth, the search for identity, the expansion of intellectual horizons, the definition of life values – all these aspects of development enter middle grades classrooms daily. The social and cultural context of development in contemporary America – with issues of AIDS, child abuse, poverty, hunger, the homeless, violence, crime, drugs, and alcohol – also significantly affects youth. As well, contemporary young adolescents, more than any other previous generation, confront major life choices concerning health, sexuality, and risk behaviors that have both immediate and long-term consequences for the individual and the larger society. Despite these challenges, the wise and experienced teacher looks forward to interacting with fun-loving, unpredictable, caring, altruistic, energetic, and concerned young people who possess unbounded senses of humor.

Wise and experienced teachers know how to provide a classroom context that supports and extends developmental issues. These teachers furnish youth with classroom environments, curriculum, and instruction that further students' knowledge and understanding of their own development, health, and sexuality. Furthermore, these teachers understand that their role in relation to their students is one that celebrates the normal life progression of which early adolescence is a part. They know, accept, and prize their roles as models, coaches, and mentors for youth.

Wise and experienced middle grades teachers create classroom environments that provide students with opportunities for making decisions, creating personal goals, and examining the individual within the context of the larger society and culture. Moreover, they engage students, both individually and in classroom groups, in issues of personal import related to their roles in interpersonal relationships, communities, and society.

Wise and experienced teachers know that the emerging abilities, aptitudes, and pursuits of young adolescents often portend future direction. They possess the knowledge and skills to provide opportunities to actively engage youth in pursuing their own interests, constructing curricular and instructional opportunities to further strengthen and develop them.

In relation to middle grades curriculum, wise and experienced middle grades teachers:

- understand the total curriculum which is both diverse and balanced;
- understand the meaning of common core curriculum (or general education);
- understand the importance of exploration and provide numerous opportunities for exploration in all that they teach;
- regard activities (e.g., clubs, athletics, performance groups) as part of the curriculum and relish their roles in delivering that part of the curriculum;
- actively engage in integrating the curriculum in various ways; and
- are skilled in leading student inquiry in at least two broad areas that are included in the curriculum.

The needs of the diverse learners described in the previous section can only be met with a curriculum that is varied and balanced. Numerous and varied opportunities must be made available to emerging adolescents in the middle grades. Basic communications and mathematics skills must be balanced with the opportunity to learn and practice higher order thinking skills, problem solving, and the skills of collaboration. Acquiring specific bodies of knowledge must be balanced with the opportunity to engage in open-ended and values-laden issues. Since both mental and social maturity are essential for success, occasions for cognitive growth

must be balanced with those for social growth. Mastery in some essential, high-priority areas of the curriculum must be balanced with the opportunity to explore a wide range of topics, talents, skills, and interests.

Wise and experienced middle grades teachers know that a study of organized knowledge must be balanced with a study of topics of concern to young adolescent learners. These teachers understand that a good curriculum for young adolescents blends elements of immediate concern to learners with an introduction to significant social issues and more organized ways of knowing. Though the emphasis may change from one area to another, the curricular opportunities they provide young adolescents combine instruction and practice in basic skills with chances to explore a wide range of topics and to pursue personal interests.

Wise and experienced teachers know that, in part, the middle grades provide an extension of the basic core curriculum that underlies success in our society. They recognize that there are areas of skill and knowledge that form the common experience for all people in a democratic society, regardless of individual talents, aspirations, backgrounds, and values. A significant portion of the middle grades program that these teachers create is built around this common core. The core includes such elements as:

1. media literacy;
2. historical and literary heritage;
3. mathematics;
4. knowledge of the natural world and modes of scientific inquiry;
5. geographic understanding;
6. understanding of diverse cultures;
7. knowledge of our system of government;
8. personal health;
9. basic appreciation of the fine and performing arts; and
10. understanding of modern technology.

Regardless of the special instructional accommodations that are made for different learners, these teachers know that all students need to achieve in this core curriculum.

While a common core is essential to the middle grades curriculum, so too is the opportunity to explore emerging interests and talents. Consequently, exploration is an essential part of the curriculum designed by wise and experienced teachers to meet the needs of young adolescents. These opportunities form part of all their curricular offerings, including the core. However, these teachers afford special emphasis on exploration

through short courses, clubs, enrichment classes, application classes, community and school service projects, elective courses, and advisory activities. They promote participation in exploratory activities by requiring students to select specific experiences from a broad array of offerings. Regardless of their teaching field, wise and experienced middle grades teachers understand and contribute to the middle school's capacity to deliver a developmentally responsive curriculum.

Wise and experienced teachers understand that activities that may be viewed at the secondary level as "extracurricular" are an important component of the curriculum at the middle grades level. These teachers recognize that activities such as play production, school newspaper, athletics, and academic competitions such as Math Counts, Odyssey of the Mind, Science Fair, History Day, and Quiz Bowl all have something to teach young adolescents. Consequently they do not consider them as "extra" but as further extensions of the exploratory menu mentioned above. They know that young adolescents need to have a selection of choices from which to develop individual talents and interests as well as social skills. Therefore, they make available a wide array of activities, coupled with appropriate advising, to all students without competitive selection limiting student choice.

Finally, an effective middle grades curriculum cannot be delivered by a collection of isolated subject specialists laboring away in their separate cubicles. Regardless of teaching field specialization, wise and experienced middle grades teachers understand the whole curriculum. In addition, since basic skills and knowledge, opportunities for exploration, and the pursuit of personal interests are part of all curriculum offerings, wise and experienced teachers reflect on how to accomplish these outcomes in various parts of the program. They know that the success of all parts of the curriculum depends upon collaboration: core and exploratory classes are often the responsibility of different interdisciplinary teams while the activities and advisory program are frequently coordinated by schoolwide steering committees and delivered by most or all faculty members. They understand that the purpose of this collaboration is to offer students an integrated curriculum that is cohesive and purposeful, not a disjointed collection of experiences.

In relation to middle grades instruction, wise and experienced middle grades teachers:

- balance teacher decision making with student decision making;
- use hands-on and minds-on learning activities;
- create a multitask learning environment;
- plan instruction backward and teach forward;
- employ a variety of assessment procedures;
- use up-to-date instructional technology; and
- call on a rich and varied repertoire of teaching strategies.

Wise and experienced middle grades teachers display the seven aspects of instructional competence listed above. These teachers recognize the need to help students successfully gain greater control over their own learning by balancing teacher decision making with student decision making in carrying out assignments. For these teachers, one manifestation of this balance comes in the differences among long-range, short-range, and day-to-day planning. Teachers have the major role in setting long-range instructional objectives because of their personal and professional experience and their knowledge of curricular expectations of the communities within which they work. Within that long-range framework, teachers negotiate with students about the best means to reach the long-range ends. For example, teachers and students together can design student projects that demonstrate what students have learned in a unit of instruction. On a daily basis, teachers structure learning tasks that require students increasingly to manage their own time and learning resources (Kierstead, 1985, 1986). In a modern post-industrial world, wise and experienced middle grades teachers allow students to engage in learning tasks that require student decision making, not the mindless conformity induced by always having to find and report the single "right" answer.

Wise and experienced middle grades teachers organize engaging learning tasks. They recognize that learning tasks have greater impact if they are multisensory, that no matter what their learning style preferences, human beings learn better and retain more when they use more than one of the senses. These teachers believe that seeing is aided by hearing; hearing is aided by touching. They know that beyond just perceiving something in more than one sensory mode, being able to manipulate that which is being studied makes the learning all the more effective.

How does the wise and experienced middle grades teacher address individual needs while delivering a common curriculum within the context of a team of heterogeneous learners? The answer lies in the ability of the teacher to manage multitask learning environments. While presenting a common curriculum that holds all students accountable for the same basic skills and concepts, these teachers provide alternative learning tasks for students with different background experiences, talents, learning styles, self concepts, and motivations to learn. They accomplish this sophisticated task by employing the balanced decision making that gives students more control over day-to-day assignments. They plan together in team meetings with other professionals who lend their perspectives and expertise to the instructional planning process.

An important instructional tool for wise and experienced middle grades teachers is the ability to plan backwards before teaching forward. Reaching any goal requires knowing in advance what that goal is. No less in teaching, these teachers know where they want students to be at some point in the future, at the end of a lesson, a week, a project, a quarter, or a semester. They know that successful instruction demands assessing the gap between that goal and the current state of affairs, that instructional planning involves answering questions such as: "How can I move my students from where they are now to where they should be? What learning experiences do they need to move from their current state to a higher state of learning?" These teachers recognize that time in school is too precious to go down many blind alleys and understand that planning backwards is a powerful means to avoid these traps.

Wise and experienced middle grades teachers employ alternative means of assessing student learning. They recognize that conventional tests help to diagnose learning deficiencies and check for understanding of basic facts and component skills. However, these teachers also know that such measures cannot assess how well students can perform meaningful tasks. They understand that when students engage in the creation of simulated or real-world products or performances, these performances must be assessed with rubrics that can structure the evaluation of complex achievements. Much as judges evaluate complex performances in Olympic diving, figure skating, or gymnastics, these teachers are skilled at judging complex student performances.

In addition to broad, generic skills in the use of technology, wise and experienced middle grades teachers know how to apply that knowledge to teaching young adolescents. They are knowledgeable about soft-

ware games, simulations, and drills that are appropriate for this age-group. In addition to applying appropriate software, these teachers possess skills that help young adolescents use computer and video technology in producing their own learning products. They realize that just having students produce written or oral reports is no longer adequate.

Finally, it should not be surprising to note that wise and experienced middle grades teachers possess a varied repertoire of instructional strategies that appeal to young adolescents. These teachers understand that no one teaching strategy will suffice for all learning objectives, nor for engaging all students. They structure several different types of cooperative groups; organize peer tutoring; use educational simulations; lead whole class discussions; integrate audio/visual media into instruction; plan strategies with students; relate lessons to community, state, national, and international events; and integrate community resources into the classroom. Connecting the school experiences of young adolescents to their larger environment is facilitated by teachers who are skilled in selecting from a wide variety of learning strategies.

In relation to middle grades school organization, wise and experienced middle grades teachers:

- understand the potential of, and work successfully on, an interdisciplinary team;
- understand the functions of advising students, and successfully serve as advisors in teacher-based guidance programs;
- participate as a member of a team and as an individual in site-based management; and
- contribute to the creation of a personalized environment in the middle school.

Successful middle grades schools have several organizational features that distinguish them from conventional elementary and secondary schools. Wise and experienced teachers understand and work successfully within these organizational features. First and foremost, these teachers understand the ramifications of interdisciplinary teaming. They understand that teams represent a paradigmatic shift from conventional school organization. Consequently, they possess the group problem-solving, team-building, and interpersonal communications skills necessary to work effectively in a team setting. In addition to the individual skills required to

work in teams, these teachers are well versed in the processes associated with teaming such as setting expectations and goals, defining roles, setting agendas, and keeping records.

Another organizational feature of middle grades schools is the teacher advisory program (sometimes called advisor/advisee, teacher-based guidance, advisement, homebase, or homeroom advisory program). Wise and experienced middle grades teachers understand the goals of this part of the total program and are well versed in the use of time set aside in the daily schedule for advisement activities. These teachers understand that advisement is not an add-on, nor is it an optional extracurricular activity. They know that it is an integral part of creating a responsive and supportive school climate for all students.

Wise and experienced teachers in middle grades schools are comfortable in contributing to site-based management. They know that highly effective middle schools operate with the advice of steering committees made up of administrators and representatives of the various interdisciplinary teams on which teachers work. These teachers understand that one's responsibility extends beyond an individual classroom to teamwide and schoolwide decision making.

Finally, and perhaps most important, wise and experienced middle grades teachers understand that effective middle schools are personalized places. They know that these schools are either small schools or are made to seem small through the use of interdisciplinary teams and advisory groups. These teachers are comfortable in schools that function on interpersonal relationships rather than bureaucratic rules, schools that are organized so that students, teachers, and administrators know each other. They know that in small, effective schools assignments and interactions generally are tailored to the needs of the people involved. These teachers possess the ability to function in environments built on relationships rather than rules.

In relation to family and community relations, wise and experienced middle grades teachers possess:

- the ability to build ever-expanding community involvement in the education of young adolescents;
- the ability to engage diverse community resources to further student academic and social learning;

- a thorough understanding of the role of family in a student's development;
- the ability to assist and support families in their young adolescent's education; and
- the ability to work with a range of community health providers, youth organizations, and social service agencies that deal with young adolescents and their families.

Young adolescent education occurs in a variety of sites and settings, only one of which is the middle grades school. Community and neighborhood organizations, social clubs, athletic teams, libraries and museums are all engaged in aspects of educating youth. Wise and experienced middle grades teachers are knowledgeable about their community and its educational opportunities and are able to build strong alliances and connections with community groups. With such connections to the community, they are able to draw on diverse community resources to support service learning and community service projects and otherwise enhance the curriculum for young adolescents.

Regardless of the shifting and evolving context and composition of families in America, young adolescents are part of family structures. Wise and experienced teachers understand the importance of the family in the education of young adolescents. They are able to assist and support families as both institutions go about creating opportunities for youth to be successful.

As family advocates, wise and experienced teachers use their role as advisors, team members, and faculty members to create curriculum, instruction, and professional relations that encourage and support parent participation in the education of youth. They are also able to work with the range of community agencies that serve young adolescents and their families.

In relation to middle grades teaching roles, wise and experienced middle grades teachers:

- promote the broad development of young adolescents;
- collaborate with other professionals, families, and community resources to promote healthy adolescent development;
- work in a problem-solving environment;

- assume collective responsibility for the education of their students;
- serve as advisors to a small number of young adolescents;
- work to build supportive communities of learning; and
- effectively manage material and temporal resources.

Wise and experienced middle grades teachers understand and practice at least seven aspects of teaching roles mentioned above. Preeminent among the teaching roles is that of promoter of young adolescent development. These teachers use their knowledge of young adolescent psychosocial development to create an atmosphere that fosters student growth in all of the areas discussed above. They provide safe places for young adolescents to carry out the great developmental tasks associated with moving out of childhood and beginning the journey toward adulthood.

Wise and experienced teachers cannot provide these safe havens for development by passing students among themselves for separate, disjointed experiences based on each teacher's area of subject specialization. These teachers understand that they must collaborate to make policy and implement the program at several different levels. On the one hand, these teachers know that schoolwide policy that provides stability across many classrooms must be developed and administered by teachers working together. At another level, they know that large schools must be broken down into learning communities that are small enough for all students and all adults to know and care about each other as well as engage in academic pursuits. These teachers work on an ongoing basis as members of interdisciplinary teams. They know that on these teams several minds working together are more effective than one working in isolation, that when teachers collaborate on teams, they see students more completely and are better able to coordinate the program and integrate the curriculum.

Wise and experienced middle grades teachers understand that collaboration is not just sharing information and students. These teachers know that it involves active problem solving, that it is much more than delivering academic treatments to groups of students. Consequently, these teachers possess the ability to diagnosis student needs based on a deep personal knowledge of them and collaboratively to select, adapt, and create curricular experiences for their diverse students. Even in an environment consisting of national, state, and local mandates regarding student outcomes, these teachers are accountable for making the decisions about

how best to promote learning of the different young adolescents who are in their care.

These two previous characteristics of the role of wise and experienced middle grades teachers – collaboration and problem solving – portend a third: collective responsibility. At the middle grades, students experience the program of an entire school, not just a single teacher. These teachers, organized into interdisciplinary teams, view the students they interact with as *our* students, not as *my* math students or *your* social studies students, much less *my/your* learning-disabled students. As middle grades team members, these teachers view their work as a collective responsibility much as parents think of rearing *their* children. Just as a father, mother, or other family member may have different relationships with their own children or children in their care, they act in concert to rear *their* children. It is the same with these teachers as they operate on teams. Individual teachers will have different relationships with different students, very probably finding it easier to form relationships with some students than with others. However, they understand that team members must work together to educate *their* students.

Yet another critical role for wise and experienced middle grades teachers is that of student advisor. It is not realistic to expect 10- to 15-year-olds to negotiate the complexity of the modern bureaucratic school without an advocate and friend within the system. All young adolescents need an adult who knows them well and can help them deal with the perplexities of growing up in a confusing environment. These teachers offer adult mediation for students faced with a multitude of bewildering choices within the context of the school.

Finally, wise and experienced middle grades teachers serve as managers of resources. Most notably, these teachers manage time, both their own planning time and the time students devote to engagement with learning. They manage their own time productively in collaborative decision making discussed above. In addition, they plan for their own individual interaction with students. Within the classroom, they are able to manage a learning environment that balances critique with encouragement, security with challenge, and relaxation with tension. Knowing when to push ahead and when to pull back is an important management skill that these teachers possess. ❑

PART III

The Organizing Principles: Initiating the Development of Wise and Experienced Middle Grades Teachers

An excellent middle grades teacher education program can be divided into three major components. The first component, foundations, consists of two major subdivisions: a broad liberal education and the knowledge base upon which the teaching profession rests. The second component consists of what is conventionally called "teaching fields," depth beyond the basics in some area(s) of academic inquiry. The third component, middle grades specialization, consists of those experiences that are specific to learning to function effectively in a school designed for the education of young adolescents. This third component involves the study of young adolescent development and the implications of that knowledge for the organization, curriculum, instruction, and community relations necessary to promote healthy growth among 10- to 15-year-olds. This component of middle grades specialization is best developed through a strong school site relationship.

Foundations

Several areas of knowledge and habits of mind undergird the profession of teaching, including an intellectually challenging, liberal postsecondary education and study of 10 areas that form the basis for sound educational practice. These "foundations" need not be defined in terms of traditional foundations of education disciplines: psychology, sociology, history, and philosophy of education. There are, however, certain skills and conceptual understandings that teachers need to master in order to function in modern schools and school systems. Parts of these

foundations would require the collaboration of a college of liberal arts and sciences to offer learning opportunities prior to, or parallel with, the site-based components of the total teacher education program.

1. Liberal Education. The major goal of a liberal arts education is the grounding of a person in his or her historical and cultural time and place. To accomplish that end, one studies the liberal arts disciplines to gain critical awareness: both disciplinary knowledge and the ability to think for oneself about that knowledge. The outcome of applying one's critical faculties to the liberal disciplines leads one to place oneself historically, culturally, scientifically, ethically, and aesthetically in the intellectual heritage of humankind.

Teaching requires macro decision-making skills, not just technical competence. Teachers must think for themselves as they engage in complex patterns of problem recognition and on-line problem solving. They must engage in a complex pattern of communication, not just give one-way performances using technical skills and a seven-step lesson plan. The intellectual qualities that are required of prospective teachers are those very things a liberal arts education fosters (Erb, 1987; Berliner, 1986; Eisner, 1994).

2. Child Development. A middle grades teacher needs to be able to place young adolescent development into a broader life-span context. Consequently, teachers need to understand human development from conception to death. Teachers of young adolescents must especially understand both the period of late childhood that their students are moving out of and the subsequent periods of human development to understand better the consequences of various patterns of young adolescent development on later health and well-being. Early adolescence is a time when youth face significant "turning points." Many young people emerge from early adolescence on a path leading to a productive and fulfilling life. For many others, however, early adolescence represents their last best chance to avoid a diminished future (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). Teachers have to be able to put the current period of development being experienced by their students into the context of a complete life cycle.

3. Consultation Skills. No longer can teachers be prepared only to teach as isolates in separate classrooms. "Collaboration" is more than a 1990s buzz word. Professionals in an information age organization can-

not survive simply by doing their own jobs. Especially in people-oriented environments such as schools, teachers must be able to communicate in a larger variety of situations than ever before. Teachers must, first of all, be able to collaborate with other teachers to make decisions about the operation of their teams and schools. They must be able to communicate with a wide variety of parents, often with some who speak a different language than the teacher, and with those who hold diverse perspectives about the role of education in the lives of their children.

To carry out their increasingly complex teaching roles, teachers must collaborate with an expanding variety of support staff: counselors, social workers, media specialists, community liaisons, nurses, special educators, and curriculum consultants to name a few. Increasingly, health and social services staff are located in the school building as the development of "full-service schools" accelerates (Dryfoos, 1994). In an era of standards-based accreditation and site-based management, teachers must work with administrators as equal partners in the decision-making processes for their schools. Finally, in addition to encounters with young people mediated by subject matter, teachers must be able to function as advisors to their students on a number of matters related to successfully negotiating the school environment. Preparation programs should and can assist teachers in making such connections (Scales, in press).

4. Diversity. The concept of diversity is currently very prominent in the teacher education literature. Teachers in the schools of the 1990s and beyond must understand and respond to students who differ from each other on a wide range of dimensions. In the first place, teachers must understand students whose race and ethnicity may vary from their own. Overlapping race and ethnicity, but defining another set of differences among children, are their socioeconomic circumstances. This factor will have a strong influence on students' experiences and values. Teachers will also encounter students who exhibit a variety of identified exceptionalities, from developmental delays to learning and behavior problems. Moreover, the differential treatment of the genders is still a major concern for educators. Educational research has identified dozens of variables upon which students differ that influence their achievement, including academic self-concept, field dependence, learning style, attribution of success, type of intelligence, general ability, and domain-specific ability. Finally, against the backdrop of all these other forms of diversity, classroom teachers must deal with developmental diversity, which itself is

multidimensional: physical, social, emotional, intellectual, moral. Understanding the array of diversity is a first step toward being responsive to it.

5. **Technology.** Teachers must be able to apply computer and multimedia technology to instruction. The chalkboard may still have its uses, but today's teacher must be prepared to access remote data bases, interact via networks, communicate through E-mail, create interactive video programs, perform desktop publishing, and use a whole host of new applications that did not even exist a few years ago. Perhaps the use of technology more than any other factor will influence the nature of schooling in the next century.

6. **Management.** All teachers, regardless of subject or grade level taught, must understand how to manage human behavior. In part, this consists of understanding human motivation. Teachers must know the options for setting the incentives that will encourage students to learn without having to resort to coercion. Management also involves understanding how to plan for successful learning experiences for students. For successful learning experiences to occur in a school context, which imposes material and temporal constraints on teachers and students alike, teachers must know how to successfully plan and motivate.

7. **Instruction.** Instruction is a decision-making process that involves many elements. Teachers must be able to relate learning experiences to students' prior knowledge and to desired curricular outcomes. The first decision then relates to what to teach. Once it is determined what the intended student outcomes are and what needs to be taught to lead students to these outcomes, the teacher must design two types of activities: those that *promote* student learning in the first place and those that allow students to *demonstrate* what they have learned. Finally, teachers must determine what their own actions will be to promote student learning. This means that teachers must find ways to engage students with the subject matter to be learned, which is a different issue than determining what teaching performance the teacher will carry out. Teacher behavior must always be analyzed in light of student learning, not teacher performance per se.

8. **Methods.** As opposed to instruction, which is the action phase of curriculum, methods are conceived as the technical understanding and knowledge that teachers need in order to successfully organize and present

learning experiences for students. The study of methods includes learning about print and nonprint, audiovisual, and electronic teaching materials. It involves knowing about community resources, both human and material, that can be used to promote learning. Methods involve learning strategies for incorporating alternatives into the planning of instruction for a diverse set of learners.

9. Changing Society. Regardless of subject area or level, teachers must be aware of how our society is changing in ways that affect the learning of young people. At the very least, teachers need to be sensitive to four major trends. First is the accelerating change in the rate of communications technology. Perhaps a short list of common terms that were not in use 10 or 15 years ago will illustrate the point: VCR, E-mail, interactive video, information super highway, fax, cashless society, electronic transfer, cellular phone, ATM, personal computer, and two-way cable communication. What was common that no longer plays a significant role in communication includes: card reader, black and white TV, dial telephone, "Your check is your receipt," manual typewriter, and carbon paper. The second trend affecting young people's ability to learn is our changing social structure. Children receive less adult attention within their own nuclear families; furthermore, extended families and whole communities no longer play a significant role in child rearing. Economic and social factors have challenged more and more families to become two-earner families. In addition, three times the proportion of single parent families exists today than three decades ago (National Commission on Children, 1991). Our mobility has removed many grandparents, aunts, and uncles from actively supporting the rearing of their grandchildren, nieces, and nephews. Third, the workplace has changed so that the skills necessary to get and keep a well-paying job have changed rapidly. No longer can one earn a decent living doing repetitive, relatively mindless tasks on an industrial assembly line. Today one must be a thinker and problem solver who can communicate as a member of a team. Finally, the globalization of our economy makes life much more complicated than in the past. Students must see themselves and their local communities in a much larger context than before. To teach today, teachers must keep abreast of societal change and adapt their own behavior to avoid obsolescence.

10. Families and Community. Partly in response to the changing social structure in our society, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent

Development's *Turning Points* (1989) called for schools to work together with families and communities in an atmosphere of trust and respect to allow students to succeed. Teachers at all levels today must be able and willing to collaborate with parents/guardians/caregivers and representatives of other social agencies to provide the conditions that promote student learning. With one quarter of all school children in the United States living in poverty, a circumstance that greatly diminishes prospects for learning, the role of the teacher extends beyond that of the traditional subject expert performing for a captive audience in an isolated classroom.

11. **Organizational Renewal/Reform.** Teachers must understand that organizations that are successful in the Information Age are organized differently than those that were successful in the Industrial Age. Failure to recognize the paradigm shift in the structure of successful organizations is a formula for failure. Teachers have to be part of the solution to creating successful schools; therefore, they must have knowledge of the change process in organizations. Schools, like all other organizations, must change in response to changing forces in the larger society or they will face extinction.

Teaching Fields

The knowledge needed to be a successful teacher of young adolescents goes beyond that of the traditional single subject matter specialist. Therefore, the prospective middle grades teacher should be prepared in at least two teaching fields, and those fields should be different (e.g., mathematics and science, not biology and chemistry). These teaching fields should be broad and interdisciplinary and encompass the major areas within those fields. Because of the importance of the core curriculum in the middle grades school and the need for interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction, at least one of the teaching fields should be drawn from the core content areas – language arts, mathematics, social studies, or science.

In addition to being knowledgeable in two or more teaching fields, including at least one core area, prospective middle grades teachers draw upon their firm grounding in the academic subjects that comprise middle grades curriculum. Their knowledge of subject matter they need should include basic academic content and key concepts that young adolescents need to understand. This allows prospective teachers to make curricular

and instructional decisions about their teaching and helps students make connections among the disciplines.

Prospective middle grades teachers need broad content knowledge so that appropriate curricular goals and instructional plans that facilitate student learning from within and across the teaching areas can be established. Middle grades teachers frequently teach more than one subject as members of interdisciplinary teams and work with colleagues in teaching an integrated curriculum. Those not a part of a team also benefit from knowledge in more than one teaching field. Knowledge of multiple teaching areas increases the likelihood that instruction, no matter what the instructional organization, will be richer, more interesting, and more meaningful for young adolescents.

Middle Grades Specialization

Young Adolescents. Prospective middle grades teachers must be afforded the opportunity to engage in both formal study of young adolescent development and reflection in practice with young adolescents. They must study and observe both particular aspects of development (e.g., physical development) and the integration of these aspects into the personalities of distinct individuals. In addition, this understanding must be integrated into curricular and instructional opportunities and find its way into the emerging definition of teacher roles. The necessity to engage in reflective analysis with a variety of instructional personnel will enable the prospective middle grades teacher to begin to establish what the profession has always aspired to create – developmentally responsive programs and practices.

Prospective middle grades teachers must also study and actively engage in activities with various social, cultural, and societal aspects that affect youth. This active engagement may be accomplished through the role of the advisor while working on site in a middle grades school, through a community service internship established outside the school setting, or while working in a youth service agency. The increased understanding that comes from this broader frame of reference should be used to inform the prospective teacher's relations with students and their families, as well as provide additional information for creating meaningful curriculum and instruction.

The developmental realities of early adolescence mean that issues related to health, and especially to sexuality, become critically important to young adolescents and therefore to those who work with them. Their interest in health and sexuality topics is pervasive and intense. Prospective middle grades teachers must begin to accept these increased demands and confront these issues of total well-being through formal study and site experiences. Middle grades teachers know that health topics have a great potential to connect content disciplines and stimulate young adolescents' critical thinking (Scales, 1993). Therefore, prospective middle grades teachers should have a "solid background" in these areas (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1993).

To have a solid background, prospective middle grades teachers should engage in both formal study and site experience with a variety of health and sexuality topics and develop skills that enable them to effectively integrate health and sexuality issues that arise spontaneously in their classrooms. Prospective middle grades teachers must be able to create safe classroom environments for readily discussing these issues; incorporate health and sexuality content into their own teaching; develop interdisciplinary-teamed curriculum with licensed health education teachers; and refer students to appropriate in-school and/or community resources (e.g., certified health education teacher, school nurse or counselor, neighborhood counseling center).

Finally, prospective middle grades teachers must come to see young adolescents as individuals with hopes and dreams, with emerging abilities, needs and pursuits. They must be thoroughly grounded in both what makes up the individual personality and how this personality is developed. A rigorous investigation of young adolescent growth – through formal study, observation, and direct participation – will enable the prospective middle grades teacher to create meaningful learning situations for his/her students.

Curriculum. In the formal study of middle grades curriculum, prospective middle grades teachers must learn to see the "big picture," even though they are predisposed to focus on the specific subjects that they are becoming licensed to teach. Seeing how the subjects that they are primarily interested in fit into the total program for students is one of the challenges of teaching curriculum to neophytes. Another major challenge is to help prospective middle grades teachers see that their curricular responsibilities extend beyond teaching the subjects they are licensed to

teach. In the first place, they need to learn not only about the role of math or English or industrial technology or art, but also how all of these areas of study fit together to provide young adolescents with an appropriate education. Prospective middle grades teachers must come to understand that curriculum is more than subject matter.

Prospective middle grades teachers must also understand how the activities program – consisting of clubs, competitions, social events, athletics, and performances – fits into the total curriculum. The special contributions of the advisory program in the overall curriculum must be understood. Prospective middle grades teachers must engage in formal study to understand the foundations these varied curricular components are based upon: the developmental characteristics of young adolescent learners, the nature and changing conditions of the larger society, as well as the content and modes of inquiry associated with various areas of human knowledge. Finally, the various concepts of integrated/interdisciplinary curriculum must be studied.

In site-based experiences, prospective middle grades teachers should first become a part of an interdisciplinary team to learn about curriculum. On that team, they engage in the planning and execution of interdisciplinary and crossdisciplinary instruction. The focus here would be on how the subject areas of their own specialization relate to the other areas taught on the team. This activity is a two-way street: Prospective teachers would grapple not only with how their areas of expertise could enhance other areas, but also with how other areas would enhance their own.

By working on site, prospective middle grades teachers learn how they can contribute to the total curriculum. They would work with mentor teachers on teams and committees to plan activities and advisory functions. They would follow this planning experience by taking an active part in the execution of these programs and engaging in such activities as assisting in club sponsorship, coaching, and advisory activities. At the conclusion of his or her program, the prospective middle grades teacher would be able to see the big picture and would have experienced active engagement with several curricular components both as planner and teacher.

Instruction. In the formal study of instruction, prospective middle grades teachers should understand the array of instructional options available to the middle grades teacher and the research base that underlies these options. This formal study of instruction should include not only

instructional strategies but also a study of assessment alternatives, including portfolios, exhibitions, and other performance measures, and how to construct and evaluate them. In addition, prospective teachers should become familiar with the impact of technological advances on instruction. Rigorous formal study would assist the prospective teacher in understanding the complementary relationship between instructional strategies, assessment procedures, and intended learning outcomes.

Through increasingly complex site-based instructional experiences the prospective middle grades teacher would practice instruction and assessment with real learners who "push back." Prospective middle grades teachers would put into practice the backwards planning of multiple multisensory tasks that provide for student decision making. These teachers-to-be would move from planning for limited numbers of students for limited periods of time to planning with a team to deliver an interdisciplinary thematic unit to a whole team of students for extended periods.

Community Service. Students do not exist in a world populated only by teachers, classrooms, and schools. Nor do they exist only between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M. Prospective middle grades teachers must come to know, through formal study and direct engagement, the life of adolescents within the larger community context of family, peers, neighborhood, and community. To accomplish this learning task they must extend their horizons beyond the school to the family and a variety of community settings. The prospective teacher observes how schools engage families through parent conferences, back-to-school nights, school-community forums, and other meeting points and then begins to integrate this knowledge through practice in advisory settings and through the assumption of responsibilities with the families of young adolescents.

The prospective middle grades teacher must also engage in extended experiences with out-of-school agencies that work with youth. These extended experiences should be structured and guided by mentors who broaden the prospective teacher's knowledge and understanding of the community's role in rearing the child. This knowledge, imported back into the classroom, provides prospective teachers with a base of information to expand curricular opportunities as well as to define the role of teacher in new ways.

School Organization. Prospective middle grades teachers should be knowledgeable about the multiple school organization patterns that

house middle grades programs, the research base of school organization, and the importance of developmentally responsive schooling. This knowledge should include organizational plans that function within various schools (e.g., school-within-a-school, interdisciplinary team organization, flexible scheduling, teacher-based guidance). As well, prospective middle grades teachers should have site experiences that provide direct participation with school organizational issues and related matters.

Teacher Roles. Once prospective middle grades teachers have had formal study of young adolescent development, middle school curriculum, instruction, and school organization, the study of teacher roles provides a synthesis of these studies. Prospective middle grades teachers should understand the complex role of the teacher through site-based experiences under the guidance of a variety of mentors. The prospective middle grades teacher should have rich and varied opportunities to observe teachers collaborating, advising, solving problems, and taking collective responsibility for promoting young adolescent development. Then prospective teachers would have multiple opportunities to practice these skills, abilities, attitudes, and dispositions and gain feedback on their efforts. In this manner, prospective teachers, through reflection in practice, develop their own personal sense of what it is to be a successful teacher of young adolescents.

School Site Program Delivery

An excellent middle grades teacher education program is directed toward one goal – the development of an excellent middle grades teacher. Two complementary elements that further characterize an excellent middle grades teacher education program are embedded in this singular goal:

- the initiation of a context for lifelong learning about young adolescents and their developmentally responsive education;
- the empowerment of an individual teacher through the rigorous investigation and application of knowledge about teaching young adolescents.

These elements are aimed at initiating the development of wise and experienced middle grades teachers, and both context and individual empowerment are significantly impacted by the location of preparation.

How well a prospective middle grades teacher ultimately functions in a school setting with young adolescents determines whether or not the goals of the program are met. Because all of the contexts within which a prospective middle grades teacher will eventually operate – with students, curriculum, instruction, teacher roles, school organization, and family and community relations – are present at a school site, the ideal location for the delivery of all of the middle grades specialization elements is the middle grades school. At the middle grades school, the prospective teacher can engage in both formal study and reflection in practice, be taught by both college and school faculty, and both observe and teach young adolescents. The power of the site experience is the power of learning in meaningful contexts, in real schools, with young adolescents.

The four distinct purposes of middle grades site experiences – expanding and enriching developmental knowledge, contact with diverse learners, practice in teaching and finding one's teaching self, and practice in operating within a middle grades school organization – are strengthened by the site-based delivery of a program. These purposes are intended to bridge the theory-practice continuum, and it is the site-based situation that further contributes to this effort.

Four criteria characterize the delivery of the program on site: early, annual, teamed, and varied. Work in the school site should begin early in a prospective teacher's career. This early beginning affords the prospective middle grades teacher (and the program) the opportunity to make important career decisions relative to teaching young adolescents, subject matter concentrations, and the formation of a teaching identity. As well, it allows the profession to make judgments relative to the prospective teacher's suitability for entry into the profession. The provision of early work allows both formal study and reflection in practice to begin simultaneously and in a healthy balance.

The delivery of an on-site program provides ongoing contact with young adolescent students and the middle grades school. Prospective middle grades teachers can move through a sequence of flexibly arranged contacts that move from structured observation and study, through initial engagement in structured teaching situations, to extended contact and responsibility, culminating in formal internships. This sequence of increasing intensity and responsibility is balanced at the site by necessary formal study and enriched by the opportunity to analyze, reflect, and discuss experiences with both college and school faculty.

An on-site program allows middle grades teacher educators to engage a variety of personnel in the shaping of a new teacher. Various teams operate in the field: the supervision triad of college, school teachers, and the prospective middle grades teacher; the instructional delivery team of college and school teachers; and the school's interdisciplinary teacher teams. By operating in a teamed situation on site the prospective middle grades teacher is afforded a variety of mentors, models, colleagues, coaches, instructors, supervisors, and "trusted friends," as well as direct experience with teams, all of which provide the opportunity to apply this learning to young adolescent students.

Schools house diversity –in race and ethnicity, gender and development, social circumstances and learning styles, and ability and interest. Middle grades preparation programs operating on site provide prospective middle grades teachers with opportunities to acquaint themselves with this complex and stimulating variety of young adolescents and apply their emerging knowledge base in real world contexts. Furthermore, on-site experiences are flexible so that other resources – social agencies, libraries, and museums – can be directly incorporated into young adolescent students' learning. Again, formal study as well as reflection in practice are continually offered in these varied contexts. ❑

EPILOGUE

A Vision of Excellence

The ultimate goal of middle grades teacher preparation programs is to prepare excellent teachers of young adolescents. Reaching this goal successfully depends on many different factors that allow and encourage prospective teachers to actively continue their professional development while avoiding a loss of momentum or even becoming static. Middle grades teacher preparation programs that lead to initial licensure are only the beginning step in this career-long process. However, without high quality, specialized middle grades teacher preparation that provides beginning teachers with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions needed for success, it becomes far less likely that they will recognize their full potential. This unrealized professional potential not only penalizes young adolescents who spend significant amounts of time with their teachers but also penalizes the teachers themselves.

Beginning teachers, as they progress toward becoming more "wise and experienced," continue their professional development by working with young adolescents and their colleagues, taking graduate classes, attending professional conferences, and reading professional publications. Quality middle grades teacher preparation programs play an essential role in this development by assisting entry level professionals as they become well prepared for success. This success, in turn, greatly enhances the chances that these teachers will not only be effective, but also passionate about their profession and their students. Perhaps just as important, this effectiveness, passion, and caring will be based on accurate knowledge and perceptions – indeed, visions – of what developmentally based teaching and learning is, rather than a set of well-intentioned, but sometimes random efforts that do not always end in positive results.

The new National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification for highly accomplished teachers of young adolescents adds an

essential component to the professional development ladder that has historically been missing in any tangible sense – an "endpoint." Of course, this endpoint does not signal the "end" of professional development for those certified, but does provide national recognition and a knowledge base desired by highly accomplished middle grades teachers. This knowledge base, in turn, serves as one of the resources to be used in middle grades teacher preparation program design. This knowledge is important in the design of both undergraduate and graduate middle grades teacher preparation programs whether or not those enrolled in them plan to seek national certification.

Clearly, the journey to excellence traveled by the prospective and practicing middle grades teachers is not the sole responsibility of initial, or even graduate level, teacher preparation programs. However, it is a crucial role with the potential to either launch beginning teachers who are well equipped for success in middle grades classrooms or fail them by sending them through programs designed to serve those wishing to teach young children or senior high students. The latter choice is highly likely to result in disappointing, unsuccessful experiences that serve neither teachers nor their students well. In contrast, the organizing principles we have presented, and their expanded view of professional development, in concert with other resources, provide a vision of what programs focused directly on preparing teachers of young adolescents must reflect.

If the professional development of middle grades teachers is to reach its full potential, individuals, institutions, professional associations, and other key stakeholders must play major roles. This means not only that these stakeholders must be willing to cooperate and contribute, but also that teacher educators must be willing to seek that assistance with open minds and sincere desires to put the more traditional roles of teacher preparation behind them. The knowledge needed is available and the vision is clear. It beckons all middle grades educators to follow. ❑

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Appendix

A Vision of Excellence: Organizing Principles for Middle Grades Teacher Preparation

a project of

Strengthening Middle Level Teacher Preparation:
A Vision of Excellence

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"A means without a vision leads to aimless drifting, while a vision without the means is naïve idealism."

This document articulates the vision needed to guide the development of exemplary middle grades teacher preparation programs. Its appearance is especially timely as the demand for distinctive middle level teacher education programs grows and must be met with quality as well as quantity. These guidelines provide flexibility in program development to accommodate individual institutional contexts and yet maintain linkage to high standards.

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